DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 245 758 JC 840 380

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TITLE	How to Lower Your Anxiety about Tests: An Edited Transcript of an Audio Tape for College Students--With an Outline and Introductory Comments.
INSTITUTION	Lane Community Coll., Eugene, Oreg.
PUB DATE	[84]
NOTE	33p.; This document may be used in place of the audiotape.
AVAILABLE FROM	Daniel Hodges, Testing Office, Lane Community College, 4000 E. 30th Avenue, Eugene, OR 97405 (Audiotape only).
PUB TYPE	Guides - Classroom Use - Materials (For Learner) (051)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Community Colleges; *Learning Strategies; *Relaxation Training; Self Help Programs; *Test Anxiety; *Test Wiseness; Two Year Colleges

ABSTRACT

This guide provides an outline of the information and techniques covered on an audiotape developed to help students lower their test anxiety. First, a rationale for the development of the test anxiety materials is provided and the use of these materials at Lane Community College is discussed. Next, a detailed outline of the material is provided, dividing the tape into the following sections: (1) introduction to the problem of test anxiety, the tape, and the sources used in the development of the tape; (2) general facts about worry and anxiety; (3) how to feel safe and reduce test anxiety by, for example, imagining the worst, accepting it, and improving upon it and preparing self-talk and self-hypnotic affirmations; (4) how to lower the sense that danger is imminent; (5) how to get belief that you have enough resources to cope successfully with test questions; (6) how to form an over-riding goal and make the goal more important than escaping danger; (7) how to focus on stimulus so that you don't think of the test; (8) what to do if you try these things and you still feel anxious on the test; (9) what to do if nothing works and you are in a severe panic and cannot work at all; (10) a warning about the things that you may have to change about yourself in order to successfully lower test anxiety; and (11) parting advice about implementing the techniques and learning more. The edited transcript is presented last, providing additional detail and advice. (HB)

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HOW TO LOWER YOUR ANXIETY ABOUT TESTS: AN EDITED TRANSCRIPT OF AN AUDIO TAPE FOR COLLEGE STUDENTS--WITH AN OUTLINE AND INTRODUCTORY COMMENTS

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HOW TO LOWER YOUR ANXIETY ABOUT TESTS: AN EDITED TRANSCRIPT OF AN AUDIO TAPE FOR COLLEGE STUDENTS-- WITH AN OUTLINE AND INTRODUCTORY COMMENTS

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For many years I have known that many students get anxious about tests. Some get so anxious that their performance is greatly reduce. But I have not known what to tell them to help them beyond a few common sense old saws. In the last few years I have been reading some of the literature on anxiety and test anxiety and have discovered that there are a lot of techniques which really work. Unfortunately, many students do not have access to this knowledge. They could get it by taking a course in Effective Learning, and they could buy books on the subject. Unfortunately, few of them take courses on how to study and few buy books. And if they did get information on anxiety reduction, they would most likely learn how to relax--and little else.

Although it can be helpful to relax, there are a couple things wrong with learning only to relax. First, when you take a test, you want to be alert and ful of energy; you don't want to be sleepy, slow and sensuously comfortable. Too much relaxation can lower a person's performance on a test. Some sources on relaxation either forget this point completely or could be confused the readers into believing it means being sleepy and relaxed. Second, modern researchers and others have found many more ways to lower anxiety. In general, the most helpful therapies involve training people to alter their thoughts, emotions, and actions. They also provide practice on these skills.

I have been concerned about the lack of easily accessible and accurate resources for our students on lowering test anxiety. When I gave a talk on it which was heavily attended and then was followed up by several people coming to the Testing Office and asking to hear the tape, I realized how important it was to many people. So I did additional research and made a formal tape on the subject. The audio tape is about one and one-half hours long. I printed the outline. Then a friendly critic pointed out how much richer the talk was in contrast to the barely intelligible outline, so we had a transcript made.

It is quite apparent that the tape and written transcript fill a need. We have a steady stream of people borrowing the tape (a $2 deposit helps guarantee return) and buy the transcript for $0.75 to cover the printing cost. Counselors and instructors send students over, and some of them read the material, too. So it is clear that people who would not otherwise know how to cope with their fear of tests have a convenient source of inexpensive information.

It occurred to me that perhaps educators at other institutions might find the outline and transcript helpful in

their own attempts to help students lower their test anxiety. Some readers may wish to make their own audio tapes. Others may wish to disseminate part or all of these techniques. In fact, if someone wants the actual tape, we could probably send it, provided our costs are covered.

Both the short outline and the full transcript follow this introduction.

I recommend that colleges should make such information available very freely to their students. Students have a strong need for information on the whole range of subjects connected with how to study and how to handle the strong emotions that college and work and frustration arouse in them. Our present methods of using counseling, study skills courses, and lectures in orientation sessions are helpful, but don't reach all the people who need the information when they need it. Audio tapes, inexpensive outlines, posters, and free handouts all have a role, too.

We provide other material for students at LCC. Students can take one or more from a series of 15 one-page and two-page study tips (see ERIC document ED 219 120). Topics cover traditional areas like note-taking, memorizing, and test-taking, and unusual topics like how to raise one's "intelligence" and how to motivate yourself and fight negative attitudes. We also have other tapes and printed outlines which have been submitted to ERIC along with this outline. They are:

How to Teach Yourself Physical Skills.

How to Prepare for Tests and Take Them Effectively: What the Experts say.

How to Use the Keyword Method to Memorize New Words Fast and Surely.

Other tapes are in the process of development on how to fight procrastination, techniques for studying math and science effectively, and problem-solving techniques for math and science problems.

The sources for this tape on lowering test anxiety are varied. I have drawn on my background in teaching social psychology and also on popular sources. I have listed a few basic sources below. Many other sources can be easily found by interested person.

Carnegie, Dale, How to Stop Worrying and Start Living. (Paperback)

Lazarus, Richard, Psychological Stress and the Coping Process. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1966. (Older, but excellent.)

Sarason, Irwin G., Test Anxiety: Theory, Research and Applications. L. Erlbaum Associates, 1980.

Tobias, Sheila, Overcoming Math Anxiety. Norton, 1978.

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**NOTE: This is an outline of a talk that is recorded on a cassette tape of the same name. The tape contains much more information.

I. Introduction

A. Your problems (feeling test anxiety and symptoms like not being able to think straight and just being miserable).
Your goal (to be relaxed OR at least able to work well on tests).
Promise. You CAN learn techniques to lower anxiety and work more effectively on tests.

B. My sources: Irwin Sarason, TEST ANXIETY; articles, stress books, social psychology background, some personal experience.

C. Outline:
1. General facts about worry
2. Five (5) general methods to lower it
3. Specific ways to use the 5 general methods
4. Eight (8) subtle things about tests that people worry about.
5. What to do when you take a test so that you have the best chance to succeed, even if you still feel anxious.
6. A warning
7. Closing advice

II. General facts about worry, anxiety.

A. Definition: STRESS is the anticipation of harm or danger. WORRY or ANXIETY is made of the thoughts and feelings that go with a person's anticipation of harm.
1. It has unpleasant effects: negative feelings, obsessive thoughts, agitation, bodily arousal, fast heart beat, fast shallow breathing, perspiration, difficulty thinking clearly and remembering accurately.

B. Worry as friend; worry as enemy
1. Friend: part of you wants to be safe. Therefore, part of the solution is to make yourself safe.
2. Enemy: Part of you has a negative faith in failure. Faith you'll suffer an unfaceable, horrible disaster. So correct that error.

C. Fight vs. flight. 2 basic methods of protection.

D. Basic principles
1a. The more intense the harm will be, as the person believes it, the more worry.
1b. The more safe the person is, as the person believes,

the less worry.

2. The more imminent the harm is, as the person believes, the more worry.

3. The more resources the person has to fight danger, as the person believes, the less worry.

4. The more the person has an important goal overriding the danger, the less the worry.

5. The more the person pays attention to other stimuli, the less the worry.

E. How to fight anxiety.

1. Do what each principle says.

2. The rest of the talk explains the many ways you can apply these principles. Some are ordinary. Some are unusual.

III. How to feel safe and reduce test anxiety.

A. This section refers to the first principle:

1. "The more intense the harm will be, according to people's beliefs, the more they feel anxiety. The safer they believe they'll be, the less they feel anxious."

2. Willis H. Carrier principle: Imagine the worst, accept it, improve on the worst.

** Imagine it only as bad as is realistic.

** Decide to accept it and live with it if you have to.

** Start to do things to make it less bad.

3. Apply this method to tests: Imagine you fail. What would happen? Be realistic.

4. Decide you can accept the worst. Repeat: Decide.

a. Why decide? Because when you freely choose to decide to do something, it sets forces in motion so that the rest of your thoughts, feelings, and action tendencies will become consistent with your decision. Reference: cognitive dissonance theory.

B. Prepare self-talk and self-hypnotic affirmations.

1. Do talk, visual imagery, positive feelings. Do it.

2. Explain why. Principle: As the person acts, he or she starts forces going which will lower anxiety. Practice and repetition build up the power of these steps.

3. Examples of useful self-talk:

"Even if I fail, I can survive the worst."

"There will still be (sunshine) (love) . . . even if the worst happens on this test."

"There are other opportunities to get a good grade, even if I fail this test."

C. There are 3 classes of people: Those who believe the world is fundamentally safe AND those who believe it is fundamentally dangerous AND those who aren't sure and struggle to make it safe.

1. Safe ones: Think--"The worst from test is okay. I'll still be safe."

2. Danger ones: Think--"The worst from test is small compared to big dangers. Doesn't make it any worse." They should separate the dangers from the test from the big dangers they fear.

** Example: Parachute training guy: "The fear was so big

It made everything else he'd ever done seem unimportant--exams, girls."

3. Strugglers: Think--either way. Also think that test outcome doesn't make world more dangerous. Truth.

D. Satisfy the part that wants to protect you from danger.

1. You are convincing it with the truth: the danger is less than it looked at first.

2. Fight the enemy part with its faith in failure.

a. Convince it that it is irrational to have faith in failure; that it is equally rational to hope for success, and that you can even tolerate failure and recover from it.

b. Self-talk: "I have hope I can do enough to pass."

** Make visual images, hear people talking hope, feel a hope sort of feeling.

E. Deliberately decide to stay in the situation and take the test. Make a big production of your conscious decision to try to take the test. Use your will.

1. Why? When you think thoughts that you MIGHT decide NOT to take the test, you make your mind think the danger is worse. Hence, your ambivalence makes your worry worse.

2. Why? If you decide to stay and fight, that decision communicates optimism and makes danger seem tolerable. Less worry.

F. The eight (8) dangers people fear from tests. How to use these suggestions on how to see-hear-feel yourself safe on these different dangers.

**Purpose: You may fear something not obvious. This list may help you recognize what you really fear.

1. Fear of failure: Total real failure OR a failure in relation to your high standard.

2. Fear of lack of control of teacher: The teacher might do anything concerning the type of questions, their difficulty, their length, and the grading standards. It means there MIGHT be danger. Unknown.

a. Cure: Face the worst. It will be X or Y. If you can handle the worst, you can handle the better. Rule out impossible things like teacher flunking everybody. Think clearly & truly. Prepare self-talk, affirmations, do them.

b. Examples of self-talk related to fear of lack of control over teacher's actions:

(1) "I have enough time."

(2) "I can miss some questions and still pass."

(3) "If everybody gets low grades, the teacher may lower the standards."

3. Fear of lack of control over your own performance: Self-doubt, possible forgetting of whole or part of knowledge or skills. People often fear they'll blow. "I'm not reliable." ETC.

a. Cure: Face the worst. . . Talk to enemy part.

4. Fear of a past test (conditioned response): current test

associates to past situation.

a. Cure: Try to track down real fear. Tell self this test is different from past. Self-talk & self-hypnosis. See-hear-feel the difference. Decide to persist. Talk to enemy part with its irrational faith in failure. Reassure protective part.

5. Fear of evaluation: Like prior item. We often fear being judged & found wanting, inadequate, a failure as a person. Your mind associates the test to evaluation and the danger of failing the evaluation.

a. Cure: same as above. Separate test from evaluation.

6. Fear of being found guilty, bad, wrong, evil: Test linked to your moral worth. Like #4 and #5. Also: you may not have studied enough and you believe you deserve to fail.

a. Cure: same as above. Separate test from moral worth.

b. Stop wrong-doing. Forgive others. Forgive self. Get right with God or with your highest sense of moral integrity. You cannot fool yourself.

7. Fear of Loss or destruction of something you are ego-involved in -- social status, personal self-esteem, family or group's reputation.

a. Cure: Face the worst. Separate test failure from your ego.

8. Fear that anxiety will impair test performance. This is worry about worry. Fear of fear.

a. Cure: Face the worst. Know truth that people can do a lot even while very afraid. Prepare skills and overlearn them. (That topic will come up later).

9. Summary: All these dangers and this group of suggestions related to the general principles that (1) the more intense people believe a harm is going to be, the more they worry; and (2) the more safe they believe they are, the less they worry.

a. This advice focussed on helping you find ways to lower how harmful you believe a danger is and raise your belief in how safe you are.

b. It's based on the fact that when you look a danger squarely in the face and consider the worst, you usually can decide that you can live with it if you have to. Then you start to improve on the situation so that worst is not so likely to happen.

IV. How to lower the sense that danger is imminent.

A. This section of advice is based on the 2nd principle.

1. "The more that people believe a harm is imminent, the more they worry. The less imminent, the less anxiety."

B. Cure: Make it seem distant, remote.

1. One day at a time. Dale Carnegie.

2. Jesus: "Therefore, do not be anxious for tomorrow; for tomorrow will care for itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own."

3. Focus on here and now. Discipline your thinking.

V. How to get belief that you have enough resources to cope successfully with the test questions.

A. This section is based on the 3rd principle.
1. The more that people believe they have enough resources to fight the danger, the less they worry.
2. Cure: You try to build both beliefs and real skills.

B. Skills: develop them.
1. Study hard.
2. Overlearn the most needed material, most likely to be tested on.
3. Learn test-taking skills. Listen to tape about these skills.

C. Develop some self-talk statements so that you can remember your skills and knowledge. Say them.
1. Example: Soldier in parachute training: "I'm trained, I'm ready, I'm fit. They wouldn't let me up if they didn't think I was ready."

D. Result: You will feel safer. Why? You really have some skills and you believe you have them.

VI. How to form an over-riding goal.

A. This section relates to the 4th principle.
1. "The more that people have an over-riding goal more important than escaping danger, the less they worry."
2. The value of the goal makes the harm from possible test failure seem small and tolerable and worth risking danger for.
3. Examples: Mother rescue child; soldier save buddies.
4. "Perfect love casts out fear."

B. Meditate on what goals you want to achieve by going to school, class, test. See the big picture.
1. See the goal, talk to self, feel the value of goals.
2. Love for people you'll serve.
3. Prepare self-talk describing why it's important to take the test.

C. Link test and goal. Picture of big goal, little danger. Talk about goal as greater than test danger. Link feelings together.

VII. How to focus on stimulus so that you don't think of test.

A. This section relates to the 5th principle.
1. "The more a person pays attention to other stimuli, the less the person worries about a danger."
2. Example: R.D. Lawrence in deep woods. Fear of cougar. He deliberately thought of a past memory of delightful ocean swim with friendly orca, killer whale. He saw, heard, felt it. It was interesting to him and it lowered his fear.

B. Techniques
1. Review a whole experience. See-hear-feel-smell-taste.
2. Use relaxation techniques. Tapes. Books.
3. Breathing exercises. Deep and slow.
4. Self-talk. "I am relaxed"
a. Do NOT say "I am not anxious." Use positive words.
5. Keep body healthy, not jittery, not tired, etc.

C. Practice. Allow time. Skill & results build up over time.
1. Practice at home. Do near test time.
2. Start with test thoughts. Immediately switch to relaxation imagery. Build a link.

D. Benefits & results.
1. Real diminishing of fear when it works well.
2. At minimum it prevents you from thinking more negative thoughts and making anxiety worse. Even if you don't feel much better, know that you are preventing worse anxiety.

VIII. What to do if you try these things and you still feel anxious on the test.

A. Remember this fact: Even if people are sometimes anxious, usually human performance is nearly as good as when not anxious.
** Example: people who play sports are famous for their pre-game anxiety. Yet they feel better as they start playing.

1. Worst anxiety is at beginning; gets easier after first contact with danger.
2. Anxiety has less effect on your ability to remember well-learned, well-practiced material than on weakly learned material.
3. Facilitative vs. debilitative anxiety.
a. Facilitative anxiety stimulates you.

B. Advice so you can work well while feeling anxious.
1. Overlearn critical material.
2. Prepare to tolerate a bad first few minutes. Do self-talk and self-imagery of it getting better.
3. Look for easy questions and do them first. Get your confidence built up.
4. Do things to anchor your thoughts.
** Put pencil on page to lead your eyes.
** Underline keywords, write meanings, write notes and purposes of questions. (Why? To fight distraction of anxiety which might make you forget things you figure out.)
5. Do self-talk on time and mistakes.
** "I have plenty of time."
** "I can make many mistakes and still pass the test."
6. Plan time carefully. Essays. Multiple-choice.
7. If distracting thoughts come, talk to them. Thanks. "I will think this thought after the test is over." Later keep promise. Otherwise, you'll disbelieve yourself next time.
8. Read material on good test-taking skills.

Or listen to a tape in this series on test-taking skills.

C. Benefits: at least you can go ahead and accomplish something. You will remember most knowledge and skills.

IX. What to do if nothing works and you are in a severe panic and cannot work at all.

A. This next advice comes from a famous book on how to cope with math anxiety. I have also read it elsewhere.

1. Relax and let your anxiety sweep over you.
2. Don't try to do the test at first.
3. Feel the anxiety in all the ways it occurs.
4. Make mental pictures that express the anxiety.
5. Say the words that the anxiety is implicitly saying to you.
6. Accept it as a fact. Thank it for being there.

B. Often when you let yourself fully feel and see and speak the anxiety, it reaches its peak and then lessens greatly. Then you are able to go to work.

X. A Warning

A. You may have to change something about yourself in order to successfully lower test anxiety.

1. People can only change if they want to change.
2. Sometimes people secretly choose to be anxious. Why? Worry is a socially acceptable emotion. They may choose worry over admitting they want something unacceptable.
3. Real motive: to be lazy, to avoid work, even to fail and escape a demand, to rebel against a teacher, etc.
4. They try to conceal that motive: they worry. "See how sincere I am. I'm really worried. I'm so worried I can't study. I guess I'll stop studying." . . . And that satisfies the secret desire.
5. Therefore, you make sure you clean out secret desires like that. Warning.

XI. Parting Advice

A. You now know a lot of techniques that people report actually work to reduce their anxiety.

1. Feel free to do just one or two techniques. Each will work.

B. Read additional books.
Dale Carnegie, How to Stop Worrying and Start Living.
Books on relaxation, stress control.

C. Read books and listen to tape on techniques for preparing for tests, how to study effectively, how to remember, how to take tests--sometimes called "test wiseness".

HOW TO LOWER YOUR ANXIETY ABOUT TESTS

by

Dan Hodges, Coordinator of Testing

Counseling Department, Lane Community College, Eugene, Oregon.

(*Note: This is a lightly edited transcript of an audio tape of the same name. It is available at the LCC Testing Office.)

Introduction

While I don't know the details as to why most of you are listening to this tape, I do have some expectations. Probably you have taken tests and been very anxious before them, and it has been a very distressing experience for you. You probably anticipate that you're going to take more tests in the future, and you'd like, if at all possible, to feel better about tests. Your goal, probably, is that you'd like to be relaxed and alert. Or if you can't get that far, you want at least to be able to work up to the proportion of the knowledge and skill that you've gotten from your studying.

Well I have good news for you. It is very possible for people to lower their anxiety and work much better than they have worked in the past. Psychologists have studied this and a lot of amateurs have studied this. They report that people change all the time.

You may wonder about my sources, and I want to tell you a little bit about what they are so that you can have some faith that what I say is fairly sound. There's a big recent book edited by Irwin Sarason called Test Anxiety, and I've drawn from it. A lot of people have written articles about test anxiety and their strategies for lowering it. In addition, there are a number of books about stress, worry, and anxiety, and I've read several of them and describe some of their suggestions. On top of that, my background is as a teacher of sociology and social psychology, and I know a fair amount of findings that have to do with stress and how to lower it, and how to change one's self. On top of that I have some personal experience and personal philosophy that I'll put in from time to time.

I want to give you some advice on how to listen to the tape. First of all, you're going to hear lots of suggestions. There's a large quantity of material here. On top of that, there is very little repetition. Therefore, once it goes by you, it may not come by again. Therefore, I recommend that you take notes. I would advise you turn off the tape. I won't know and I won't care and I won't be offended. So turn off the tape long enough to take notes and then turn it back on again. On top of that, there's nothing I can tell you that you can passively listen to and that automatically will lower your anxiety. You will have work to do, you will have practice to do in order to put these suggestions into affect. So take it in that spirit and you should be okay. Here is the outline of what will happen in the talk.

1. I'm going to start first with describing some general facts about worry and anxiety.

2. Secondly, I'm going to describe five general methods that will work to lower anxiety.

3. After each general method I'm going to talk about the specific ways to apply each method to test anxiety.

4. In the process, I'm going to describe eight subtle things about tests that people worry about. These are things that you may not think of, but knowing them will help you to attack your own test anxiety.

5. Fifth, I'm going to describe what to do when you take a test so that you have the best chance to succeed even if you still feel anxious and even if none of these techniques work.

6. Sixth, I'm going to close with a warning about something that could stop you from lowering your anxiety.

7. And seventh, I'll have some closing advice and comments to give you.

General Facts About Worry and Anxiety

I want to basically define what anxiety is. Anxiety is an expression of a person's anticipation that harm will come or that harm may come. Worry and anxiety express themselves through your thoughts, your feelings, and your body. People that are worrying get very obsessive thoughts and usually they are very negative thoughts like: "I'm going to fail," "I have no hope," "This is an impossible situation." They also have difficulty thinking clearly, and they have a lot of difficulty remembering. Concerning feelings, people usually have a very bad, negative, dread sort of feeling. And as far as the body goes, people get all sorts of bodily symptoms: sweaty palms, the heart beating fast, the breathing fast and shallow, the body restless, the muscles tight, shoulders tight, and sometimes their head aches. You've been through it, so I don't need to describe anymore.

With worry as an expression of anticipation of harm, you can see worry partly as a friend and partly as an enemy. This may be a little surprising to you but it's real. The friend part of worrying is this: There's a deep part of you that wants you to be safe. When you anticipate that harm is coming, this part of you activates and sends you the worry so that you'll take action to make yourself be safe. This fact is going to be the foundation for some of the advice I give. Since this part wants you to be safe, we're going to work out things that you can do so that you will be safe.

A second part of worry is an actual enemy. As you've probably experienced, worry partly is a faith in failure. It's also a faith that the disaster you face is unthinkable, is destructive, is so harmful that you can't think about it, that it's unfaceable, that it will destroy you. The cure to the enemy is to correct that error in your thinking, to correct that faith in failure and you'll be better.

Another aspect of worry is the famous "fight versus flight" polarity. When people fear and when people are anxious, there are two ways to cope with it. One is to march forward and fight the enemy, the other is to flee the enemy. One is to take action, the other is to escape from the danger. These are two ways in which you can protect yourself, and we'll talk more about that later.

Basic Principles

Science has discovered at least five basic principles about what affects the intensity of worry and anxiety that a person feels.

1a. The the more safe people feel they are, even though harm is coming, the less they worry.

1b. And conversely, the more in danger they feel they are, the more they worry. The more intense the harm is coming, the more they worry.

2. The more imminent the harm is as the person believes it, the more the worry. Now, imminent means that it's very close, that it's almost upon you. The opposite of imminent is that something is distant. So imminent harms cause more worry than distant harms, distant dangers.

3. The more resources people believe they have to fight a danger, the less they worry. Now resources are any skills you have, any friends you have, anything that you think will fight the danger and prevent it from overcoming you.

4. The more that people feel they have a very important goal to go toward, one that is so important that it overrides the danger, the less they worry. What this means is that you want something so much that you're willing to go forward and face the danger because the danger is small compared to the important goal that you want to do. When such a goal exists, then people worry less.

5. The more that people can pay attention to other stimuli than the danger the less they worry and the less they feel anxious. The point is if you're distracted from the danger, you don't think about the danger and you feel safe.

With these five principles, you get clues as to how to fight anxiety. Basically you do what each principle says. So I'm going to go principle by principle and describe how your knowledge of these principles will help you to reduce anxiety, and along the way there will be some unsuspected angles that you'll hear.

PRINCIPLE #1: HOW TO FEEL SAFE AND REDUCE TEST ANXIETY

Face the Worst

The first principle has to do with feeling safe and reducing test anxiety. The more safe you feel, the more your anxiety automatically goes away. The first method you can use to feel safe comes from a book called How to Stop Worrying and Start Living, by Dale Carnegie. It's very famous. It was written in the 1940's and its aimed at men in business. So, its examples tend to come from there, but it's very human and it's a very, very good book, and I wholeheartedly recommend it to you. Dale Carnegie calls the principle the Willis H. Carrier formula, named after the founder of Carrier Air Conditioning Systems. When Willis Carrier was a young man, he was in a situation working for another company, and he had to install some air conditioning equipment for a firm. When the air conditioning didn't work, it was partly his responsibility, and he started worrying enormously about the danger to his company, the possible loss of his job and humiliation for himself. In this personal crisis he discovered how to cope with it.

What he did was to imagine the worst possible thing that could happen under the circumstances. As he looked at it, he decided he'd accept it if necessary, and then having that emotional peace, he set about improving on the worst. Of course, it turned out that he was able to think clearly then and devise a solution. The failure was changed into a success and he emerged a hero.

The first step for you is to imagine the worst. What you do is to imagine as bad a situation as could realistically happen. You don't imagine something that might never happen, but you imagine what you realistically think could happen if you fail in the situation. You mentally run down all the bad things. You just tick them off.

Secondly, you decide that you're going to accept the situation and live with it if you have to. Now you're not saying that you have to face the worst, but you decide that IF you have to, you'll live with it. And in the case of a test, what you'd do is imagine a failure. Then you imagine all the consequences of the failure, and you think through and decide to live with it if you have to.

Then thirdly, you start to do things to make it less bad. That's the step where you improve on the worst. Now considering school and studying for a test, how do you make a test "failure" less bad? You study on the important things so that you have chance to succeed, perhaps to go from an F to a D-, if you're thinking that pessimistically.

I snuck something in that I want to bring out and emphasize. I said you decide to accept it and live with it if you have to, and it's this word "decide" I want to stress here. To decide something means that you consciously come to a decision that you will accept the worst. It's the opposite of looking at this worst and passively saying, "I can accept it, I can accept." Don't do that because you know the worst might be very painful, it might be very difficult to live with and there might be some things that you probably couldn't accept. Instead be like a philosopher, like an existentialist. Consciously decide that you will accept the worst.

Now why stress this? There is a psychological principle that comes from cognitive dissonance theory that says that, if people decide to do things, afterward the other parts of their minds and personalities will change to be consistent with their decision. So if you decide to face something, your feelings will actually change so that you are more able to accept it, and your supporting thoughts will actually change. So if you consciously decide to accept the worst of a test failure, you'll find that your feelings will give a sigh of relief and your thoughts will change and your body will change and swing into line and be more peaceful.

More on the Carrier formula. I am imagining you on the night before a test when you are feeling anxious about it going through this phase of imagining the worst and deciding to accept it and improving on the worst. However, the next morning or the next afternoon, you've got to remember what you decided.

Use Self-Talk

You should prepare what is called "self-talk." Psychologists use the term self-talk to mean you're just talking to yourself quietly. You don't

necessarily talk out loud, but you talk in your mind and you say things to yourself to reassure yourself. Now I advise you to use only self-talk that you really believe. So if you have decided to accept the worst, then your self-talk will be, "Even if I fail, I can survive the worst." You memorize that little sentence and sort of mentally take it with you to the test the next day. As you feel anxious, you just repeat that sentence which you know is true. "Even if I fail, I can survive the worst." "There will still be sunshine even if the worst happens on this test." Or, "There are other opportunities to get a good grade even if I fail this test." If that's not true by the way, don't say it. Notice there are three examples of self-talk related to imagining the worst and accepting it and improving on the worst.

There's a variant of self-talk that you can try that has to do with self-hypnosis. What you do is prepare a few statements (in this case related to facing the worst), and then you get yourself relaxed and calm and breathing slowly. Then you say those statements to yourself about 20 times. You might do it while you are falling asleep. You might do it while you wake up. You might do it during the middle of the day in a relaxed state. But you say these things to yourself.

Besides talking to yourself as a way of influencing yourself, you can use visual imagery and conjure up positive feelings. For instance, instead of talking to yourself saying that you can survive the worst, make a <u>picture</u> of the worst happening and a <u>picture</u> of you reacting positively to it. Then think that picture at yourself, and it will affect another part of your brain and have a different effect on feelings than talking will. Again, imagine the worst happens, imagine the negative feelings, and then imagine a rush of positive feelings, and do that enough so you can memorize it. Then when a test comes you can talk to yourself, send visual images, and send feelings to yourself.

<u>Remember Your Basic Assumptions</u>

Another type of advice on this basic category of how to make yourself feel safe and reduce test anxiety comes from an odd topic--people's assumptions. For crude purposes we can classify people into three types. There are those who believe the world is fundamentally safe, those who believe it is fundamentally dangerous, and those who aren't sure but are struggling to make it safe.

Now, by referring to the people who believe the world is fundamentally safe, I mean people who have worked it through and think that ultimately the world is good and that they are good and things ultimately are okay. Often such people are religious believers. They believe in God; they believe in life after death. They think that ultimately everything comes out okay.

Now, if you're one of these people and you're anxious about a test, a cure is fairly simple. What you do is this: you take this thought of the ultimate safety in life and bring it right next door to the thought about the worry from the test. Now the worry from the test is a particular here-and-now worry. But you take your here-and-now worry and put it in connection with your ultimate safety, and then this ultimate safety will put this worst from the test in its secure context and make you feel safe.

You can do this by self-talk or by making a mental picture. With self-talk, you just say to yourself, "I know the world is okay. This test is just one

thing and I'm okay." Or with a mental image, make a mental image of a huge safety region and then make a mental image of that small test, like a little black spot in the middle of a huge light. Then imagine the light sort of swallow up the black spot. (By the way, this stuff about mental imagery comes from the best psychology books on reducing stress. Take it to heart and use it. The same with the self-talk.)

Moving on from the people that think the world is fundamentally safe to the people that think it's fundamentally dangerous: The people that think the world is fundamentally dangerous have made a philosophical conclusion something like the existentialists have done. We are all vulnerable all the time. For example, you can be walking down the street and a meteor can fall on your head, or a car can hit you, or you can be robbed, or the atomic bombs can fall, or an earthquake can strike, or you can lose your friends and loved ones, or you believe that you yourself are dangerous. You are aware of your own wrong doing, your own weaknesses and so the world is in danger from you. Whatever it is, people that believe that the world is fundamentally dangerous have this sense that we just aren't safe.

Just now you may wonder how such people keep going. When they do it, they make the existentialist leap of faith. They have the courage to be. They know there is danger but they know they are alive, and being alive they decide to act despite the danger.

How does a person that believes the world is fundamentally dangerous face a test? Well it's easy, because if you've faced the big dangers in the world like starvation, famine, earthquakes, and atomic bombs, this little test you're taking, and its minor consequences for your life are very, very small compared to the big dangers. If you should take the test and fail, it doesn't make the big dangers any worse or any more dangerous. You know they are still going to be there.

The key here is that you <u>separate</u> this teeny weeny test danger from the great big things you fear and make yourself think that this test is a little thing and is different than the big things. In other words, what you are fighting is the danger of thinking that this little test danger is as big as the big danger as you really fear. It's not, so separate it.

Do you notice the polarity? The people who feel the world is safe bring their feeling of safety right up in connection with the fear about the test. Whereas the people who feel the world is dangerous do the opposite. They separate the big dangers and their feelings about the big dangers from their feelings about the test. This method of thinking makes you feel safer because you know no matter what happens on the test, it's not going to make any difference to the big things. I read an example in a book about the military. There was a young man in parachute training who was very, very afraid of jumping out of the plane. The fear was so big, it made everything else he'd ever done seem unimportant, like exams, girls, sports, and so on. Well, it's the same thing for you. If you have feared the big things, then exams seem little.

The third type of people are the strugglers. They are not sure whether the world is fundamentally safe or fundamentally dangerous but they want to make it safe. They have a choice of ways to think and so do you. Either you're safe, in which case bring the test close to the safe feelings, or the world is

ultimately dangerous, in which case then separate the little test from the big dangers. Another thing you can do is to think through this truth: No matter what happens to you on the outcome of the test, it doesn't make the world more dangerous. That's the truth. Make up a little sentence for self-talk and tell it to yourself. But the key is, avoid getting trapped into the thought that you've got to pass a test because otherwise it proves the world is dangerous or you've got to pass a test in order to keep safe. You see, that's not true. The world just isn't that way.

Now all of you three classes of people need to work out your thinking over a period of several days or several weeks before tests so that you get these philosophical truths deeply imbedded in you. You also need to make up some self-talk to say to yourself about this.

Going on to another way to make yourself feel safe, recall I said there's a part of test anxiety that's a good part, that's a friend. It sees danger coming and it wants to protect you from danger. So it sends worry to you as a signal to get your attention to make you act. Now what you need to do is to convince it with the truth that the danger is less than it looked at first. That's why you used the Willis H. Carrier method of "imagine the worst, decide to accept, and decide to improve on the worst." Or you bring together your feeling of safety with the worst from the test and you separate the worst from the test from the big dangers and so forth.

Worry as an Enemy

The other aspect of worry is an enemy to you. The enemy part of worry is an irrational faith that says, "I've got to fail. The only thing that can happen is I'll fail." It's an irrational faith that if you do fail, it's just going to be horrible. You just can't stand it. It'll destroy you. That part of worry is completely irrational, and it just tells you everything is horrible. Now what you need to is to convince yourself (don't try to convince the enemy part because it will never believe) that it is irrational to have faith in failure. It's irrational to have faith that a failure would be intolerable. Instead, the truth is that many failures can be tolerable, and it is possible to recover from them and go on. One can have a lot of self intact even after a failure.

On the topic of worry is the enemy. Here is another bit of advice. Have you ever wondered what the opposite of worry is? I think the opposite of worry is hope. You see, worry thinks there might be a totally destructive danger, but hope thinks there might be a very good outcome. Since people worry before tests, when they don't know what the future holds, it is just as rational to hope as it is to worry. So develop some self-talk like, "I have hope that I know enough to pass." "I have hope that I have skill enough to do well on this test." In addition make visual images, hear people talk and hope, and feel a hope sort of feeling. Then practice doing these things so that you can do them on the day of the test.

By the way, all through this talk I'm going to stress talking, seeing and feeling as ways to get yourself to get the truth into you so that you'll lower your anxiety. You may notice I'm not going to tell you to try to lower your anxiety. I'm going to tell you to affect what you think and what you hear and say and what you do, and the anxiety will lower itself. You might just note that.

Decide to Take the Test

On the topic of feeling safe I have another bit of advice that has to do with will, the part of the person that makes decisions. The advice is this: at some point while you're worrying before the test, I recommend that you deliberately decide to stay in the situation and to go take the test. I recommend that you make a big production out of your conscious decision to try to take the test. Now you wonder about this. This suggestion goes back to the principle I mentioned before that when you decide something, then afterward the rest of your personality swings around and falls into line with the decision. Now when you decide to stay in the situation the rest of your personality will fall into line and back up the decision. Moreover, there are a couple other reasons to decide you will definitely take the test. First of all, when people worry very often they are thinking, "I've got to go to the test, but I want to flee the test. I want to leave the test." And they go back and forth between almost leaving and almost staying but they haven't made up their mind. Well, when you almost think you're going to decide to leave, it makes your personality think the danger is worse. Going back and forth between choices makes you feel worse because you're not fleeing an you're not fighting. So the decision clears it up. Secondly, if you decide to stay and fight, the very fact that you made the decision communicates optimism to the deeper parts of yourself. It tells these parts that the danger must be tolerable because the big boss decided to stay and fight, and then your worry will go down afterwards. So I recommend that you deliberately decide to stay in the situation and take the test.

Eight Dangers That People Fear From Tests

This is going to be a list of some subtle and unsuspected things that people fear about tests. The principle I'm using here is that if you know the enemy, you can better fight the enemy.

1. The fear of failure. I've talked about this already. The most obvious thing people fear on test is failure. Now there are two types of failure. There's a real total failure, like you get an F on a test. Or there's a failure in relationship to whatever your high standard is. For instance, a kid that has gotten straight A's in physics may regard a B+ as a failure. Or person who has parents who say, "I expect A's from you," can regard one B as a failure. Or if your standards are B's, then C's are failures, etc. All of the techniques that I've talked about will work in lowering your fear of failure.

2. People fear the bad consequences of their lack of control of the teacher. The teacher controls everything about the test. The teacher controls the type of questions, the difficulty of the questions, the length of the test and the grading standards. Because the teacher controls it, it means to you that there might be danger, but you don't know for certain there's danger. If the teacher does the worst and asks the most difficult questions and makes the longest test and uses the highest possible grading standards, you may believe you are sunk. But it's unknown. You might be okay. A lot of worry comes from this mystery and uncertainty about what the teacher will do and the lack of control. When people can control something, when they can control a danger, they feel safe. But teachers are something you can't control.

How can you cope with this fear? The things I've talked about before will work here. For instance, face the worst. Whatever the test is, it will be X or it will be Y. It will be easy or it will be hard. So if you can face the worst and decide to accept it and build on it, you're okay because if you've decided you can handle the worst that the unpredictable teacher can throw at you, you can obviously handle anything better than that. (By the way, in imagining what the teacher will do, rule out impossible things like the teacher flunking everybody.) Think clearly, think the truth, and prepare self-talk, affirmations, good imagery and use your prepared thoughts and they will help you.

With respect to the things teachers can do unpredictably, I have several suggestions about self-talk that will work. First, with respect to having enough time on the test, I would urge you to think through the fact that teachers have to be reasonable with a whole class of students. So the teachers will set time enough, and you can say, "I have enough time. If I don't have enough time, most of the other students don't have enough time." So you can truly say I have enough time. On almost all tests it's possible to miss questions and still pass, still get C's, still get B's, still get A's because it's almost impossible for a teacher to set perfection as a standard. Prepare self-talk that says, "I can miss some questions and still pass." Even though you can't control some questions the teachers ask, you can still be reassured that you can miss some things and pass. The third thing is very useful, and I say this because I've been a teacher and I know the situation. If the teacher has goofed and made a test that's too hard, the teacher can lower the standards. So you can say as self-talk, "If everybody is low, then the teacher can lower the standards and I'll be okay." And even if the teacher doesn't lower the standards on that test, the teacher can secretly make the next test easier, or the teacher can give extra credit work and so forth for you to raise your grades.

3. Many people fear that they will lack control over their own performance. They have self-doubt. They fear that they might get to the test and forget stuff they've learned, or they fear that they can practice a skill like piano playing or some manual skill and then when the test comes, they'll forget how to do it. You might inspect yourself to see whether you have this self-doubt and that one of the things you secretly fear about tests is that you just don't trust yourself.

   There are cures for this. One of the cures is to study honestly because if you goof off in your studying, you'll know it, and there will be a part of you that will know you won't do well. This part will, in a sense, talk to you, and it will say, "You don't know enough to pass the test, and therefore, you're going to do poorly." So, if you study reliably, you're telling this deep part that you do have control over your own performance.

4. A fourth thing that people fear is an unconscious thing. The current test they're going into accidentally activates a memory of past test situations. So if that happens to you, when you think you fear the current test, really what's going on is a fear that comes from a past test. Your unconscious mind is equating the past and the present together. This is called a conditioned response. The current test makes you associate to a past situation.

One cure to this is to try to track down the real fear and then to separate the fear of the terrible thing you had in the past from the thing you have in the present. For example, I personally have picked up a fear of German Shepherd dogs from a time when, as a 12 or 13-year-old kid, I walked up to a house to deliver a newspaper and those people had a visitor who owned a big German Shepherd. The German Shepherd saw me as an enemy, walked toward me stiff-legged, growling, and really scared me. From then on, I've had to see new German Shepherd dogs and tell myself, "This German Shepherd is not that German Shepherd. I'm safe with this new German Shepherd," and so on. So, the basic cure here is to track down the past situation that you're really afraid of. If you've got real bad conditioned responses, sometimes it's good to talk to psychologists, or psychiatrists or counselors because they are very good at helping people track down things from the past.

Once you get it, and even if you don't get it, you use self-talk and self-hypnosis to help yourself. Again you should stress to yourself the difference between this new test and the past tests; you should see, hear, and feel every single difference about this new test from the past test. Say to yourself, "This teacher is different, this teacher's grading policies are different, the subject is different." Then say, "Even I am different, I am five years older now," or "I am ten years older now." Decide to consciously persist and talk to the enemy part and say, "It's just as rational to have a faith in success. And reassure the protective part of yourself that the current test is not as dangerous as the past test. By the way, you will find that this particular set of suggestions about conditioned responses will help you a lot. It takes a little while sometimes to break them down, but many people are able to break free from fears of past tests.

5. Another fear linked to fear of tests is a fear of evaluation. Social psychologists sometimes call it evaluation anxiety, and it's a bit like the prior item on fears of past tests. People with evaluation anxiety are afraid of situations where they're putting on a performance and they know people are watching them or people are listening to them, and then they're going to be judged. And what they fear is that after they're judged, they'll be found wanting, that the other people will find them inadequate, that the other people will find them as a failure as a person. They associate the test to being evaluated and judged and to the danger of failing evaluation.

   The cure to this is the same as above. Separate the test from evaluation. Now, this sometimes gets linked to your sense of yourself as a good and a bad person and this leads to the sixth fear.

6. Many people unconsciously fear that the test and their general sense of being guilty, bad, wrong, and evil are associated together. Many people underneath themselves have a general sense that they are morally inadequate. I used the word <u>moral</u> deliberately. They feel just wrong as persons. If you'll take what I say in the right spirit, they feel they're sinners. Now you may not use the word <u>sin</u> yourself, but inside yourself do you feel that you're inadequate, that you're a bad person? Many people do. This often is inculcated when we are children. When people go to take a test, they unconsciously deeply associate to this sense that they are just bad people. Their fear is if they fail the

test, it will reveal this thing they fear, that they are bad people. So they've got a much worse sense about the test than they would if the test were just a test.

Another angle about fear of being found guilty is that most students don't study enough, and they know they don't study enough. They try to get away with as little possible. If you study too little on certain tests, you know deep down that you haven't studied enough, and you feel a little guilty. Feeling guilty as you approach the test, you believe you deserve to fail. You believe it's morally right to fail. You believe you ought to fail, and since you think you should fail, pop goes the anxiety and worry. And you can't turn it off--unless you can turn off this sense that you're a guilty, a bad, a wrong, or an evil person.

How do you cue this? Well, in addition to using the general suggestions I've given before, you can do some other things, too. First of all, think it through about tests and about what makes you morally okay as a person. Of course, you'll see the truth that you can fail a test and still be an okay person. Now I can speak to this because my name is Dan or Daniel, and I happen to know the Biblical meaning of my name--"God is my judge." Now as a little kid, I got brought up with a sense of inferiority and a feeling that other people were looking at me and finding me just inadequate, just not as good as them. But my name reminds me that God, the ultimate in the universe, is my judge, and not people. By the way, as I say this, I am aware some of you don't believe in God, but that's okay. If you don't believe in God, think about the ultimate truth about people, and then you can separate what happens on a test from the ultimate truth about what you're morally worth. Separate them, separate them.

Now I have a different kind of advice on how to stop feeling worried because you link tests to your moral guilt. If you are doing something wrong that you know is wrong in another area of your life, stop doing it, and you'll find that your test anxiety goes down because you won't be linking the test to this wrong doing. If you do wrong and know it, you will feel you deserve to be punished. So when a test comes up with its possibility of good grades and poor grades, praise and punishment, you're going to believe you to deserve to fail on the test. That belief will activate your worry part that tries to protect yourself. Whereas if you stop wrong doing, you feel innocent and good. You don't feel you deserve to fail, so you don't expect to fail, and you feel safe when you take tests.

There's still another way to handle guilt. I recommend that you forgive other people for anything wrong they've done against you. Here is why forgiveness lowers test anxiety. If you carry a grudge against people for something wrong they've done, then deep inside you, you know you're the sort of person that judges people for the wrong they're doing. You will know that when you take a test and make mistakes, you're not going to forgive yourself because you're not forgiving other people. Therefore, you'll criticize yourself. The worry part of you that's a friend says, "I'm being criticized for possibly failing a test, so I'd better send worry so that I will take care of myself." In contrast, if you forgive other people, then your deep self knows you're a forgiving person. Therefore, it knows that if you take the test and fail, you'll

forgive yourself and accept yourself. There's no danger, therefore, no worry. So if you forgive others, it'll be easy to forgive yourself, and you'll feel safer when you go through evaluation situations like tests.

Also I recommend that you consciously forgive yourself. If you've done something wrong and haven't been able to forgive yourself, then get right with God or with your highest sense of moral integrity because you can't fool yourself. If you forgive yourself on the other things you've done wrong, then your forgiveness will radiate into additional areas of your life like test taking. I have said quite a lot on this topic, but it is quite real. If you can clean up that part of you that feels guilty, you'll find that your test anxiety goes down.

7. Many people fear after they take a test and fail it that they're going to lose or destroy something which they're very ego involved in, something that they care a lot about. For example, people care a lot about their social status among their friends, their personal sense of self-esteem, the personal standards they want to live up to, and sometimes their family's reputation or their group's reputation. For example, a person might say, "My family always does well in school," or "Nobody in my family has ever dropped out of school." Or if you belong to an ethnic group that's trying to prove itself, you might want to succeed on a test in order not to let them down.

   How can you lessen this fear? Think it through. Think about all the possible things you could lose, the social status, the self-esteem, your family's reputation, etc., and face the worst, decide to accept it, and improve on the worst. In addition, use some of the other suggestions I have given earlier.

8. People often fear that their anxiety will impair their test performance. This is interesting. It is worry about worry, fear about fear. Most people have had the experience of being worried and finding that they can't do as well as they can when they're relaxed. They've also heard people say, "I was so worried I couldn't remember my own name." If you have a fear of worry, then when you notice yourself worrying about a test, you think , "Oh dear, I'm going to worry. The worry means I'm going to forget things and do worse." You not only have a straight, simple, pure, clean worry about the test, you also have a worry about the fact that you're worrying. And then you notice you're worrying about worry, so you worry again. You might start a cycle where your fear builds and gets higher and higher and higher.

   The cure for this fear is the same as some of the others. You face the worst, decide to accept the failure if you have to, and improve on the worst, and you use some of the other techniques. In addition, you should remember what is found psychologically to be true. People can do very, very well while they are very afraid. This is proven both by the behavior of soldiers in war and by student doing intellectual tasks. Later, I will talk about how you can prepare your skills and overlearn them so that you can function even while you worry.

PRINCIPLE #2: HOW TO LOWER THE SENSE THAT A DANGER IS IMMINENT

I've been talking all this time about the first principle that the more safe people feel, the less likely they are to worry. I'm now going to turn to the

second principle which is, "The more that people believe harm is imminent, the more they worry." This means that if you think a danger is close and about to happen, you worry more than when you think the danger is tomorrow, next week, or five years from now. The cure for this sort of worry is to make a test seem distant and remote from you, make the failure distant and remote.

Dale Carnegie, writing in How to Worry and Stop Living, states as one of his of basic worry principles that we should try to live each day in day-tight compartments, to live one day at a time. Think about the one day that you're working on. So when you are three days before your test, force yourself to think about this day, and this day's preparation. You're going wrong if you find yourself thinking ahead to the test and then thinking in your head about doing poorly and imagining yourself with your pencil in your hand and having that sick feeling and imagining questions that you can't answer. If this brings the test up real close to you (an imminent danger), then stop that thinking, withdraw into today, and do your work today.

To buttress this point, may I quote something Jesus said because he uses the same advice about worry. He says, "Therefore do not be anxious for tomorrow for tomorrow will care for itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own." Kind of amusing. You'd think Jesus would have taught faith, but he says, each day has trouble. So, face the day's trouble and for you, on the day before the test, your trouble is to study hard. So study hard. You've got to focus on the here and now and discipline your thinking. You'll find this very helpful. When you find yourself vividly imagining failure and the consequences of failure, or any of the eight dangers that I talked about, pull yourself back to right here and right now, and do the tasks that are in front of you. As you do this, your worry will lessen.

PRINCIPLE #3: HOW TO BUILD THE BELIEF THAT YOU HAVE ENOUGH RESOURCES TO COPE WITH A TEST

The third principle basically said that the more people believe they have enough resources to cope successfully with a danger, the less they worry. The word resources means skills you have or friends you have or tools or weapons to fight a danger. With respect to tests, skills have to do with what you know and manual skills and anything else that is called for.

There are two aspects to resources. You've got to believe you have skills, and you've got to really have skills. So, first of all, develop skills, and it's just simple advice. Study hard before tests. If you know certain material is going to be very needed, then overlearn that material. Study it harder and longer than you need to. Use several memory devices rather than one. As you do this, the deep part of your mind will know you have the skills and therefore feel safer. You'll worry less. On top of this, you've got to believe you have the skills. Therefore, it's advisable when you know something, to talk to yourself about what you know. Develop some self-talk statements so that you can remember your skills and knowledge and say them. Again, I'm reminded about the book I read about the soldier in parachute training. Before his first jump he said over and over and over to himself, "I'm trained, I'm ready, I'm fit. They wouldn't let me go up if they didn't think I was ready. I'm trained, I'm ready, I'm fit, etc." Well, you can do the same thing. If you have studied certain material, the sheer fact that you remember you studied it and tell yourself that you know you studied it will tell yourself that you have resources to cope successfully with the test questions.

Your belief in your knowledge (resources) will tend to lower your anxiety because it makes you feel safer.

PRINCIPLE #4: HOW TO FORM AN OVERRIDING GOAL

The fourth principle about handling worry had to do with forming an overriding goal. The idea was that if you want something very intensely, so intensely that you're willing to go through the dangers of the tests, then your worry is less. The value of the goal makes the harm from a possible test failure seem small, seem tolerable, seem worth risking danger for.

You've heard stories, for instance, like this one: a mother is outside her house and her toddler wanders toward the street and out in front of a car, and the mother races after her toddler to rescue her child, despite the danger of being hit by the car herself. She'd normally be afraid of being hit, but it's so important to her to rescue her child that she doesn't think about the danger to her, and she doesn't feel too much fear. Or if she does feel fear, she overrides it. Or you've probably heard about situations in war. We have a teacher here at Lane Community College who during World War II saw a hand grenade come in near some of his buddies; he jumped on it and it exploded and badly wounded him. He survived and now walks around with a limp. In his situation the goal was so overriding and so important, he was willing to go through the danger, and that cast out his worry. I saw my wife do something like this. We once had a cat that she loved very much. One summer day--in a summer that had been very hot and dry--a huge snake slithered out into the street from the fields above our house. Our little three-colored cat, Trillium, was curious about the snake and went over to smell it. Marcia is deathly afraid of snakes, but she wanted to rescue Trillium so much that she walked over very cautiously, trembling as she went, and picked up Trillium and walked away from the snake. In the Bible, this is the principle: perfect love casts out fear.

You can do this kind of thing too. If it works well, you won't even be afraid. Even if it doesn't work, you'll have an energy and a moral impetus that will carry you into the test, and give you the thrust to attack the test, and do what you want to do.

Here's what to do: First of all, meditate on your goals for going to school, for taking the class, and for taking the test. Look at the big picture as to why you're there. And as I've said before--use vision, use self-talk, and use feelings. In other words, see what you want, talk to yourself, and feel the value of the goals.

I'll tell you a hint that will help you develop a strong goal. Most people, deep down inside, have somewhere a deep love for other people. Sometimes we forget it in the day-to-day rush of things, but we have a sincere desire to serve people. And as you go to school, you're learning knowledge and skills that will gradually build up and help you serve people. You don't know them now, but they will be real individuals, and they will come to you and you will help them. Meditate on this love for people; meditate on this desire to become competent and skilled.

Think about why you're taking the test: you're taking the test so that you can be honestly rated as to whether you are prepared in this area of knowledge and skill to help people. And if you love people, you want to make yourself a

good, well-qualified person. You don't want to be passed through if you do poorly. I realize some of you may be snickering, and some of you may wish that you could pass anyway. But if you dive down inside yourself to the pure, honest, good-hearted part of yourself, you'll find a part of you that really wants to be really qualified. And if you're not qualified, you'd rather be hurt with a low grade than to hurt real people later because you got passed with shoddy skills and because you did a cheap job.

Regardless of how you feel, meditate on your goals and get the big picture. Then make a picture of the big goal and the little danger (the test), and put the two together. That's the picture part. Now talking. Talk to yourself and say, "This goal is so important, I'm willing to go through the danger of a poor grade for it." And feelings. Link your feeling of fear of the test with your positive feeling for the goal, with your desire to go to the goal. Then put the two together, and the positive desire for the goal will leak into the fears about the test and change them.

One more thing about these goals--there are some goals that are for yourself, and some goals that are for other people. In general, this overriding goal principle will work better if you think about unselfish goals, giving goals, moving outside yourself. That's just a word to the wise, and I hope it's sufficient.

PRINCIPLE #5: HOW TO FOCUS ON A STIMULUS SO THAT YOU DON'T THINK OF THE TEST

Okay, the fifth principle for reducing test anxiety says that the more you give your attention to some stimulus other than the test, the less you'll worry. The point here is you cannot think of two things at once, and thoughts come before feelings. Feelings follow thoughts. When you feel worried about the test, it's because somewhere inside you you're thinking about the test and thinking about its fear. So what you need to do is to consciously focus on something else.

Let me tell a short story to illustrate this. One of my favorite nature authors is a man named R.D. Lawrence. He's a Canadian writer who writes about the out-of-doors and animals. In his latest book he described being out in the wilderness in British Columbia studying cougars. It was night and he had set himself up a place to observe a recent cougar kill, expecting the cougar would come back at night. As he waited these long, lonely hours, his mind started going through stories he'd heard and books he'd read about cougars--mountain lions--attacking people. He began to spook himself and to get scared and to think of leaving. Lawrence had had long experience in dealing with fear--so he went into a past memory of something that was very delightful to him. Within the past six months, he'd taken an ocean voyage up the northwest coast of British Columbia, and during that period of time, he'd had a delightful time with a friendly killer whale. He had fed it, and eventually it had gotten so friendly, he'd jumped into the water and swum around with the killer whale, and touched it, and felt it. It was a very interesting experience, very profoundly moving to him. So he tried to get completely back into that situation--to see the whale, to feel himself in the water, to feel himself swimming, to hear the sounds that he heard then, and so forth. As he did that, eventually it drove away the fear.

When you try this, it takes a few minutes, and it may not work perfectly, but at least when you do it you know you're going in the right direction. You're not doing what's wrong.

Okay, now after this example, let's review these techniqes.

1. Focus on a stimulus other than the test, review a whole experience, let yourself see it, hear it, feel it, smell it, taste it--imagine yourself moving, recall it as vividly as possible.

2. Use relaxation techniques. You're probably aware there are many books on how to relax, how to get peaceful, how to get tranquil. The stimulus you focus on is this enormously friendly sensation of relaxing. And the more you focus on being relaxed, the more impossible it is to think about being tense and worried in front of a test. I'm not going to talk too much about that on this tape. There are many audio tapes and books available on this, and all you have to do is look for books on relaxation, stress, tension reduction, and you will find many techniques you can use.

3. A third technique relates to breathing exercises. In order to relax you want to be breathing deeply and slowly. You don't want to be breathing high up in your chest or breathing fast. There is an intermediate level and pace of breathing which is best to aid your concentrated work; if you practice that, you're more likely to be relaxed and effective during a test.

4. You can also try self-talk to get yourself relaxed. I mean saying, "I am relaxed, I feel tranquil, I feel serene. I think of my math exam and I feel so peaceful. I think of my science test and I feel bored and sleepy and comfortable." That's the kind of thing you say to yourself.

   I have a recommendation as to what not to say. Avoid saying, "I am not anxious. I am not afraid of my test." Why should you not say that? The reason is that when you say "not anxious," your mind has to think of the concept "anxious," and then go "not" and put a big X through "anxious." It means you're calling up anxiety at the same time you're trying to cancel it. Instead turn to positive self-talk like, "I am relaxed, I'm calm, I'm serene, I'm tranquil"--and call it up and feed it, put energy into it, and let it get stronger. So the advice is: avoid using negatives when you self-talk. Use positives.

5. Keep your body as healthy as possible, and avoid doing things to your body that will produce feelings that resemble stress. In other words, if drinking coffee gives you coffee jitters, during a test you'll feel that tension, that shaky feeling that seems like anxiety, and it'll associate to anxiety, and you will be more likely to feel anxious. Also if you've eaten too much food, and have a stomach ache, and have gas, your body's feeling will be likely to make you feel anxious. Or if you've drunk alcohol the day before and you have some hangover on the day of the test, that feeling can resemble stress on you. Basically what you should do the day before is have a normal day with good eating, without too much work, without too much exercise. Go to sleep in plenty of time and get a full night's sleep. Then when you wake up and go to the test the next day, your body will feel as healthy as possible. So when your mind gives attention to your body, your body will say, "I'm just humming right along nice and peacefully." Then that'll help you--when your body feels good, you won't be thinking so much about worry.

To summarize, the five techniques are: mentally move into a whole experience, use relaxation techniques, do breathing exercises, recite self-talk, and keep a healthy body. You should plan to practice. It takes time for your skill to build up, and it takes time for the results to build up. I recommend you practice your techniques to distract yourself from fear at home and then do them near the test time, if you have to. Also, a good thing to do is to start with thoughts of your test, then link them to the relaxation imaginery. So whenever you think of tests, you've got a built in little railroad track that runs from the test into peace. Again, you will find more about this as you read some of the relaxation books.

You get a lot of benefits from this. There'll be a real diminishing of fear when it works well. The interesting thing is, if these relaxation techniques don't work, nevertheless at the minimum, they prevent you from thinking more negative thoughts. They prevent you from making anxiety worse, so that even if you don't feel much better, you'll be preventing even worse anxiety. Yet even as I say this, I expect most of you will be feeling better.

<u>What You Should do if You Try These Things and You Still Feel Anxious on the Test</u>

Sometimes it will happen that you will come to a test and still feel anxious. You will wonder how to work and think so you can get as high a grade as possible even while you feel anxious. You'll need this advice the most in the first few days or few weeks of trying these things. You'll need it less as you practice and get more experience with these techniques. You may also need it if you've worked yourself into a horrible case and you're incredibly anxious.

First of all, and I tell you as a person with a Ph.D. in sociology, who knows social psychology, that even if people are anxious, usually human performance is nearly as good as when people are not anxious. Yes, people's performance drops, but not as far as you fear it will. An example is very easily obtained: people who play sports are famous for their pregame anxiety, yet they get better as they start playing. You must have read about football players vomiting in the locker room before games and so forth. So you should remember this as a fact. If you tend to think your anxiety is going to totally destroy your performance, then give yourself the true self-talk that you will be able to do almost as well, even if you're not anxious.

A second fact about it: the effect of anxiety on your performance on a test will be worse at the very beginning. After you make your first contact with the test and start proceeding through it, you'll feel better and better. In general, first contacts with dangers are the worst, and after that people get involved. Getting involved leads them to forget their anxiety and they begin to work better.

A third thing is that anxiety has less effect on your ability to remember well-learned and well-practiced material than it has on weakly learned material. You can expect anxiety to do bad damage to skills and knowledge you've just barely got, but not to do too much damage to stuff you've studied very thoroughly.

Fourth, psychologists make a distinction between two kinds of anxiety: facilitative anxiety and debilitative anxiety. Facilitative anxiety is anxiety that facilitates your ability to do something. The word facilitate means help. So your personality and your body produce a little anxiety, and it produces adrenalin in you--speeds your breathing and your heart rate, makes you think more clearly. Therefore, you actually do better if you're a little tense, than if you're too relaxed. So when the anxiety comes, say, "Thank you, Anxiety--you're going to make me do better!" Now realistically, there is also debilitative anxiety. This is quite rare, but when it comes, people tremble all over, they sweat, they can't think straight they're horribly confused, they're just overwhelmed with it. This can happen to excellent students as well as poor students. It is usually associated with other life stress in a person, and a person doesn't get it on all tests. If you have debilitative anxiety, some counseling, or a talk with a counselor or psychologist will help. You can also attack debilitative anxiety with long-term efforts by practicing some of the methods I've been describing. But the point I want to make is that most of your anxiety will be facilitative anxiety, and you can thank it and not worry about worry, not fear fear.

Now, some advice on what to do before a test if you believe you may be anxious at a test. First of all, over-learn critical material. Study it harder than necessary. Use the best mnenomic techniques. Mnenomic is a word that has to do with memory, and there will be another tape in this series on good memory techniques. In fact there will be several tapes on memory probably by the time I'm done. I urge you to listen to them or get books on how to study effectively and how to memorize. If you use good mnenomic techniques and over-learn important material, then you'll remember it even if anxious, and you'll be able to survive the test. Second, mentally tell yourself that you're going to tolerate a bad first few minutes on the test. Forewarned is forearmed. If you're prepared for it, it'll be easier; if you're not prepared, it'll be harder. Do some self-talk that says, "It'll get better, I'll feel more relaxed in a few minutes." And make yourself some imagery. See yourself getting better. And do some feeling associations. Think of yourself feeling better. And this is true, this will happen.

Third, if you've got the sort of test where there are several questions, or several parts and some are easier for you and some are harder, look for the easy questions and do them first. The reason is that you'll do them best, and you'll get over your first contact anxiety, and your confidence will build up.

Fourth, you should do things to anchor your thoughts. Now use the word anchor, and think of yourself in a boat with a big heavy anchor, throwing it overboard and it hooks down in the mud underneath the water, and holds the boat from drifting. On a test, how to do anchor thoughts? First of all, take your pencil or your finger and put it right on the page where you have to read the instructions and the questions, and use the pencil to lead your eyes as you read them. Why do you do this? It has to do with what anxiety is doing to your mind. Because of anxiety your mind will flip back and forth between the words and your anxious thoughts. You'll read "a plane flew 500 miles on the way to Denver," but your anxious thoughts will go right in the middle: "A plane--flew--500 miles--oh, I'm gonna fail--on the way to--this is terrible--Denver." Your interruptions and flicking back and forth from thought to thought will interfere with your eyes giving you the information from the question. Whereas if you put the pencil down, you'll keep your place. As you

move it, it will lead your eyes and lead your thoughts, and you'll take in the questions more clearly.

Here is another thing to do to anchor your thoughts. If they let you write on the test, then take your pencil and underline key words in the questions. Or if there's a technical term, just jot down its meaning right beside it. That way you won't work and figure it out and then forget it. Also write little notes to yourself. Write about the purpose of a question. All of this writing will fight distraction and anchor your thoughts. Basically you should write as much as possible, write little notes to yourself and things like that. When you relax and think clearly, write less.

Another piece of advice is to do self-talk on time and mistakes. Say to yourself, "I have plenty of time, and I can make many mistakes and still pass the test."

You should plan your time carefully if you've got essays. For example, if you've got an hour to take a test, and the teacher says two questions are 20 minutes each, and another two questions are 10 minutes each, then get your watch out, plan the time, and actually work out mathematically when you start and when you finish. That way you'll work effectively despite being anxious. The same with multiple choice questions. If you've got 50 questions and 50 minutes to do them in, just jot down what time it'll be at the halfway point. Just so you can keep on track.

My next suggestion will probably surprise you. It deals with the problem of thinking unwanted, intruding thoughts. When people are anxious, they sometimes get very distracting thoughts. Sometimes obsessive thoughts like, "If I fail, I'm gonna have to drop out of school, and I'm gonna have to get a job." And then they go on to, "I gotta get a job, and what job will I get?" You start thinking about family problems, or if you're a young man, you might think about your girlfriend, or if you're a young woman you might think about your boyfriend, etc.

Here is the surprising advice: handle distracting thoughts by talking to them as if they were people. Say, "Thank you thought for coming and trying to help me, but I'm busy now--I'm taking a test. I will give 15 minutes to you after this test is over." In other words, treat the thought like a person and promise it time after the test is over. When you do, normally it'll go away and you'll go right back to the test. Later what you must do is to keep your promise and spend your 15 minutes thinking about having to get a job if you fail the test or whatever. Now I urge you, if you make this promise to yourself to think a thought afterwards, keep your promise. Otherwise, your future self who takes the next test will remember that you made a promise to a distracting thought and broke the promise. As a result, you'll disbelieve yourself next time, and the distracting thought will stay there because a deep part of you wants to protect you and wants to make you think that thought. In summary, you can handle distracting thoughts by talking to them and promising to talk to them later.

Another bit of advice to lower anxiety would be: Read and study material on good test-taking skills. There are several books in the Lane Community College Library on test-taking skills. This information is also available in courses on effective learning. I have made a tape in this series about good test-taking skills that you can listen to. The benefit of you doing these

things is that even if you're anxious, you'll be able to go ahead on a test and accomplish something. You will remember most of your knowledge and retain most of your skills.

What To Do If You Are in a Severe Panic and You Cannot Work at All

If you have debilitative anxiety that totally overwhelms you, here's the advice: Give in to the anxiety. I'm assuming you're sitting in the test room, swamped with fear. Just feel it, open up your mind, open up your feelings, open up your imagery, open up your self-talk. (If, however, you believe you might break down if you feel your fear, then don't do this.) Feel it, see the bad images, hear your obsessive thoughts, listen to them--just let them swamp you. It won't hurt you to open up to the anxiety. It won't be any worse than it is now. You just let it in completely. Don't fight it. Don't try to make it go away. Just let it be there. You see there's a part of you that wants to tell you, "I am scared!" It wants to come through. So let it through and let it satisfy itself. Then try to help that anxious part express itself. It's okay to mentally talk about it and say to yourself, "I feel afraid that if I fail this test, I will . . ." Say what you're feeling, or try to help it by making a few pictures. But accept it.

People who do this find that it can't last. It eventually goes away, and as you plunge into it and satisfy it, it surges and crests and then fades. So I recommend this. And by the way, this technique comes from one of the books on dealing with math anxiety, and it comes with good credentials, and it's likely to work. I've also read this principle used by psychologists and counseling people, and it works in many other situations. So if all else fails, just let it flood through.

If you're feeling this anxiety right at a test, you won't want to do it because you'll feel time is critical. But you should realize that if you keep fighting and your anxiety is debilitative anxiety, you may not be able to do anything constructive on the test. But if you let it in and spend a few minutes with it, you at least have a chance to recover something from the test. It's better yet on the day before the test or the night before the test, to give in and let all the feelings and the images and the self-talk in. I mean the bad self-talk. Again, this works and it won't harm you.

A Warning

I want to warn you that you may hear this and try to change something about yourself in order to lower test anxiety, but then find you can't do it. It may puzzle you. In order to lower anxiety, you may have to change an interior attitude first. First, it's a general principle that people can only change if they want to change. And interestingly, sometimes people secretly choose to be anxious. It's as though they want to be anxious. And I want to tell you why. The reason revolves around the fact that in America worry is a socially acceptable emotion. If you say you're very afraid of a test, people will accept you, they'll understand. They've been worried themselves, so they'll sympathize with you. Because of our cultural attitude, people sometimes will choose to worry rather than admit to themselves and others that they want something that's socially unacceptable or something that's personally unacceptable.

Now let's get down to the nitty-gritty--sometimes the real motive of people who are students is to be lazy, to avoid work. Sometimes they even want to

fail so that they can escape a demand. This demand could come, for example, from a parent who forces them to study a subject they don't want to, or it could come from somewhere else. They resent the demand, they hate it, they don't want to do the subject, and yet they can't admit that they want to fail.

Another motive that's fairly common is that people rebel against teachers. Teachers have authority, teachers tell you what assignments to do, teachers give you tests, and some teachers have obnoxious personalities. A persons' desire to rebel leads to the desire to fail a test. It happened in the movie, "The Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner." A runner was trained by a coach that he hated. He ran and could have won the race but near the end he stopped and he let everybody else win. It was because he didn't want the coach to share any of the credit for the victory.

If your motives are to be lazy and avoid work, or to fail, or to rebel, you probably don't like those motives, particularly selfish, lazy motives. Therefore, you may try to conceal them--even from yourself. Well, one easy way to conceal them is to worry. The worry, in a sense, is saying, "See how sincere I am. I'm really worried. I'm so worried that I can't study. Since I can't study, I guess I'll stop studying." And then once you stop studying, that satisfies your secret desire. Or a second scenario: it's the day of the test. You don't want to do well, you want to rebel. So you go into the test and you worry. Once you're worried you stop trying, and that satisfies your secret desire not to try.

Okay now, if this is you, I warn you to make sure you clean out your bad secret desires. If there's a part of you that wants to be lazy and doesn't want to study and doesn't want to do honest work, if there's a part of you that wants to fail, then you need to address those things and get yourself straight. Decide inside yourself that you want to study, you want to work, you want to accomplish things.

Parting Advice

You're at the point now where you know a lot of the techniques that the psychologists and the experts talk about that actually work to reduce anxiety. As I've said, there are many people that do successfully reduce anxiety. You'll probably be one of them if you use even one of these techniques. I want to remind you that there's so much here that you should have taken notes. If you haven't, then I urge you to listen to the tape again and take notes. Feel free to do one technique, or just two techniques. Anything will work. Normally, however, the more tools you have in your tool kit, the more good results you'll have. I also recommend that you read additional books. Dale Carnegie's HOW TO STOP WORRYING AND START LIVING is an excellent book, if you can get past the focus on men in business. Many books on relaxation and stress control are also good. If you learn effective study techniques and effective memory techniques, this will also reassure you. One of the research articles I read found that when people learned specific ways to study for tests and take tests, their test anxiety went down, too, because they knew what to do. This field is sometimes called test-wiseness, and the LCC Bookstore has books on it. There are study tips near the LCC testing office, and there will be more tapes in this series on studying.

In conclusion--imagine that it's three months from now, three months in the future. Imagine that you are effectively using some of these techniques, and lowering your anxiety. What would have happened for you to get this result? Well here's what you'd have had to do:

- you listened to the tape
- you listened until you understood it
- you believed that at least one or more of these techniques would work for you
- you consciously made the decision to practice, you did practice
- when you made mistakes you corrected them
- when you did things successfully you repeated the successes
- and then you developed some way so that you'd remember to use the techniques on real tests.

This last comment is what's important--you've got to develop a way so that when a test comes, you give yourself a signal in your mind: USE THIS TECHNIQUE! Well that's what you would do if, in three months from now, you use these things effectively.

There are, however, people who listen and say, "Hey, that was good!" Then they get up and walk away. The next test comes and when they get anxious all over again, they can't remember what to do. Now as I sit here in this small booth, finishing off this talk, I wonder who you people are and I wonder what you will do. Would you ask yourself this question and then think it over and give your honest answer? Ask yourself, and answer: "Is it important enough to me to lower my anxiety about tests to actually practice some of these techniques? Is it important enough?" What's your answer?

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